

Remarks Honoring Central European Nations on Their Upcoming Admission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

May 8, 2003

Thank you all very much, and welcome to the White House. We're glad you're here. Interestingly enough, it was here, 58 years ago today, that President Harry Truman announced the end of the war in Europe. And the people of America and Europe celebrated that victory together.

This year on V-E Day we mark another kind of victory in Europe. Just hours ago, the United States Senate voted unanimously to support NATO admission for Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. These heroic nations have survived tyranny. They have won their liberty and earned their place among free nations. America has always considered them friends, and we will always be proud to call them allies.

I appreciate the Foreign Ministers of the NATO nations—or the nations who will soon be joining NATO—who are with us today. We just had a great discussion in the Roosevelt Room in the White House complex.

I appreciate so very much the Secretary of State Colin Powell, who has been a strong and tireless advocate for the expansion of NATO.

I want to thank the Members of the United States Senate who have joined us here today. I appreciate Majority Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee for coming. I particularly want to thank Chairman Dick Lugar and ranking member Joe Biden for their strong leadership in getting the Senate to vote unanimously for the admission of these nations into NATO. Great job, Senators.

I also am honored to welcome George Voinovich, the Senator from Ohio and, more importantly, Janet Voinovich, his wife—*[laughter]*—and Senator Carl Levin from Michigan. Welcome. I'm glad you all are here, and thanks for coming.

I want to welcome the chairmen and chairwomen of the Parliamentary foreign affairs committees who are here. I appreciate the Ambassadors from our current and future allied nations who are joining us today. I want

to thank General Richard Myers for joining us today, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And I want to thank all of our distinguished guests for coming.

The defeat of Nazi Germany brought an end to the armed conflict in Europe, but that victory did not bring true peace and unity to the Continent. For millions, tyranny remained in a different uniform. The freedom of Bulgaria and Romania and Slovakia and Slovenia was subverted by Communist dictators. And Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were wiped off the map as independent countries.

As the Iron Curtain fell across Europe and walls and barbed wire were raised, the free nations of Europe and the United States gathered their will and courage and formed the greatest alliance of liberty. Through 40 winters of cold war, NATO defended the security of the western world and held in trust the ideal of freedom for all the peoples of Europe.

This division, this great standoff, did not end in military conflict. It ended when the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe took history into their own hands and took back their rights and their freedom.

From that moment, it was clear that the old lines dividing Europe between East and West, the lines of Yalta, were entirely irrelevant to the future.

Nearly 2 years ago, in Warsaw, I urged the enlargement of NATO to all of Europe's democracies, from the Baltic to the Black Sea and all that lie between, so that peoples in those countries would have the same chance for security and freedom enjoyed by Europe's older democracies.

I called upon all the NATO Allies to renew our mission and to meet the great challenges and opportunities of the world beyond Europe. And these challenges arrived quickly. Following the terrorist attacks of September the 11th, NATO invoked its commitment to the collective defense for the first time in its history.

Our friends in Central and Eastern Europe responded as well, providing resources of law enforcement and intelligence to help break up terrorist cells, to disrupt terrorist plots, and to cut off terrorist funding.

In the battle of Afghanistan, nations from Central and Eastern Europe supplied soldiers and special forces and peacekeepers to help defeat the Taliban, to help destroy the terrorists and to bring freedom to the Afghan people.

In the battle of Iraq, Central and Eastern European countries have stood with America and our coalition to end a grave threat to peace and to rid Iraq of a brutal, brutal regime. The peoples of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia have a fresh memory of tyranny. And they know the consequences of complacency in the face of danger.

Time and again, they have demonstrated their desire and ability to defend freedom against its enemies. They have proven themselves to be allies by their action, and now it is time to make them allies by treaty.

This morning's vote in the Senate brings that day closer. I urge all the current members of NATO to welcome these new members as quickly as possible. These nations will make NATO stronger, and we need that strength for all the work that lies ahead. We must continue to fight global terror and strongly oppose the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

NATO itself must develop new military capabilities to meet the emerging dangers of a new era. We must help the people of the Balkans to become full partners in the progress of Europe. We welcome the commitment of Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia to the values and principles of NATO. And we will help them as they move forward with reform.

We have work ahead in bringing order and security to Iraq, so the Iraqi people can build the institutions of freedom and provide an example of democracy to other Arab nations. And just as NATO has stood for the freedom of all of Europe, we must stand with people everywhere who strive for greater freedom and tolerance and development and health and opportunity, including those in the Middle East and Africa.

This day was a long time in coming, yet there was never any doubt. Through decades

of crisis and division, Europe's peoples shared with people everywhere the same need and hope for freedom. This hope overcame the designs of tyrants, and this hope overcame the tragedies of war.

The nations of Central and Eastern Europe are one of history's great examples of the power and appeal of liberty. And we believe that example will be followed and multiplied throughout the world.

Thank you all for coming. May God bless your nations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:38 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Foreign Minister Solomon Pasi of Bulgaria; Foreign Minister Kristiina Ojuland of Estonia; Foreign Minister Sandra Kalniete of Latvia; Foreign Minister Antanas Valionis of Lithuania; Foreign Minister Mircea Dan Geoana of Romania; Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan of Slovakia; and Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel of Slovenia. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on the Death of Walter Sisulu

May 8, 2003

I was saddened to hear of the death of Walter Sisulu in South Africa on May 6, 2003. Walter Sisulu was a man of great moral and strategic vision who committed his life to leading the struggle to end apartheid rule in South Africa. Sisulu was a man of principle and humility whose pursuit of an inclusive, multiracial South Africa never wavered through the 25 years of his imprisonment. Walter Sisulu lived to become a free man and to see his vision become a reality. He leaves a legacy of courage and conviction for South Africans, and all of us who share his belief in the equality of all people.

On behalf of the American people, I extend our deepest sympathies to Mrs. Albertina Sisulu, the Sisulu family, and the people of South Africa.